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MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence 3 May 1957

SUBJECT : High Level Meeting on Project AQUATONE

1. As explained to you on 2 May, the paper to be handed by you to the President at the May 6th meeting has been cut down to a brief status report. A copy is attached hereto and copies have been sent to the Air Force. (Tab A)

2. It is understood that the following topics which are now excluded from the formal paper will be raised by you, probably in this order, for discussion at the meeting:

- a. Alternative Lower Priority Targets.
- b. The RAINBOW Program.
- c. Maintenance of a Non-Military Overflight Capability.
- d. Proposed Modification of Operational Concept.

I have drafted a separate paper on these four topics indicating the line I believe we should take on each. Copies of this paper have gone to the Air Force who are fully aware of our views. This paper is also attached hereto. (Tab B)

3. I hardly need remind you that the third of these topics is the sensitive one because there is not full agreement between the Air Force and ourselves on this matter. I have drafted the paragraph on this topic with great care in an attempt to emphasize that the difference between the Air Force and ourselves is a difference in our estimate of what our own political authorities would prefer. I urge you to emphasize that our disagreement is of this nature, since we have no desire to maintain an overflight capability unless we stand a better chance than the Air Force of being allowed to use it, while the Air Force has no desire to stop us if they are convinced that this is the case. It follows that instead of having a debate with the Air Force about the views of the political authorities it is simpler to ask what they are.

4. I know that it is difficult to control the course of such a meeting as the one planned for the 6th but I would urge you to make a major effort

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at least to raise all four of these topics so that we can try to get, if not clean-cut decisions, at least some feeling for the President's views. I repeat, the Air Force is well aware that these issues will be raised.

5. I have prepared still a third piece of paper which contains a number of arguments I hope you will have an opportunity to use in favor of letting us operate. (Tab C)

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RICHARD M. BISSELL, JR.  
Project Director

RMB:djm

1-DCI

2-DDCI

3-Proj. Dir. Chrono

4-Proj. Dir. Subject

5-Deputy Project Director

6-Proj. Chrono (Hold)

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AQUATONE/OILSTONE PROJECT

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1. Status:

a. Weather conditions are generally favorable for aerial reconnaissance [redacted] and most of Siberia from April through October and in the Far East are moderately good in summer and at their best during the autumn.

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d. A similar military capability is currently being developed by the Air Force which is equipping a SAC squadron with Air Force procured U-2 aircraft. This unit will be operationally ready and available for deployment by 1 August 1957.

e. It now appears that the U-2 will be relatively safe from interception at least through the present reconnaissance season and possibly, under certain circumstances, considerably longer. Nevertheless, both its margin of advantage and the security surrounding this operation are subject to continuous erosion so the AQUATONE capability must be regarded as a wasting asset.

2. Plans for the Current Season: Additional hard intelligence obtainable only through aerial reconnaissance is urgently required, especially on developments and installations having to do with Soviet guided missiles, nuclear weapons, and intercontinental bombers. To cover thirty-five such targets which have been selected by the Intelligence Community as having the highest priority should require some twelve to fifteen successful missions, taking account of normal weather patterns. If permission is granted to conduct these overflights it is proposed that they be undertaken only as highly favorable weather materializes so as to obtain maximum coverage with a minimum number of sorties. This would imply a rate of operation of only one to three missions per week.

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3. Maintenance of a Non-Military Overflight Capability: The principal reason for developing the AQUATONE capability originally within a CIA framework (but as a joint Air Force/CIA Project) rather than in the Air Force was to maintain greater security, employ deeper cover, use civilian pilots, keep the aircraft outside of military control, and therefore, make possible more plausible denial of U.S. military responsibility in the face of any Soviet charges. On the other hand, it can be argued that an operation of this character can be conducted as securely by military units operating under military cover as by the Clandestine Service, that the distinction between military and civilian control is irrelevant to the possibility of denial and therefore that this tool is politically no more useable for overflights in the hands of the Clandestine Service than in the regular military establishment. Although this issue could be debated at length between this Agency and the Air Force, what is really important is the attitude of the political authorities of our Government. The decisive question is whether they believe (rightly or wrongly) that the use of U-2 aircraft for overflights by the Clandestine Service will give rise to lesser risks of embarrassment or counteraction than their use by a tactical military arm. If this does turn out to be their view, it would seem to be worthwhile to continue the present joint operation through 1958, probably with some changes in organization and cover and on a reduced scale, in order to maintain the capability where it would be most likely to be used. Meanwhile the parallel Air Force capability would be developed separately. If, however, the political authorities believe that the political risks are the same for nonmilitary as for military overflight operations, then it is proposed that CIA's equipment be transferred to the Air Force at the end of the current reconnaissance season.

4. Proposed Modification of Operational Concept: If the present joint project organized within a CIA framework is continued beyond the present season, consideration will be given to the following modifications of present operational concepts. Their purpose would be to reduce the political hazards to which overflights give rise or to be prepared for unfavorable political developments and thus to render the U-2 capability politically more useable.

a. The use of non-U.S. pilots [REDACTED] in order to heighten the possibility of plausible denial.

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b. The modification of a few of the Agency's aircraft to permit basing them on an aircraft carrier and thereby to avoid the exposure of friendly governments to political and diplomatic pressures.

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ADDITIONAL BUSINESS CONCERNING PROJECT

AQUATONE/OILSTONE

The paper on AQUATONE prepared for submission to higher authority contains a brief account of the current status of the Project and plans for operations during the current season. All other issues were excluded in order to focus attention on the major decision required at this time. It was agreed, however, in conversations with representatives of the Air Force that the following additional matters be discussed orally with the political authorities along the lines indicated under each heading.

1. Alternative Lower Priority Targets: If authority cannot now be granted to overfly some or all of the highest priority targets in the USSR, it is important to determine whether:

(a) Overflights of the following lower priority areas (listed in the order of priority) should now be conducted:

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(b) There is sufficient prospect of receiving at a later date authority for overflights of the USSR to warrant postponing operations over lower priority areas.

2. The RAINBOW Program: During the last nine months significant progress has been achieved through this Project in the development of radar camouflage. It is believed that the radar reflectivity of the U-2 aircraft can be so reduced as to create a good chance that a majority of overflight missions will avoid detection entirely. Nevertheless, it must be anticipated that at least a certain proportion of them will be detected, although their continuous tracking should be extremely difficult. Our plan is to equip the U-2 aircraft with this protection if and as it is operationally developed. If it is effective, it will reduce not only the likelihood of detection and tracking but also the possibility of interception even after the Soviets have developed aircraft or missiles capable of operating at extreme altitudes.

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AQUATONE MEETING

9:30 a.m. Monday, 6 May 1957

BRIEFING NOTES FOR DCI

The following are points you may wish to make orally in the forthcoming meeting on AQUATONE.

1. Russian awareness of U.S. overflights, though undoubtedly a source of irritation, should increase their willingness to consider a realistic mutual inspection system and in particular an effective version of the open skies proposals. The knowledge that they cannot altogether prevent aerial reconnaissance should increase the attractiveness to them of a plan to control and regularize it.

2. Although overflights can be regarded as provocative, it is difficult to understand how they could provoke any counter action except the most vigorous efforts at interception. The Russians know, even if no overflights are conducted, that our offensive air capability exists. They have given every evidence of believing correctly that overflights are conducted only for reconnaissance purposes. Above all, knowledge that it is possible for our aircraft to overfly their country beyond the reach of interception, perhaps carrying high yield weapons, would be a powerful deterrent to overt attack no matter how "provoking".

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4. The President's Advisory Committee on foreign intelligence has unanimously recommended that overflight missions be resumed.

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